

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

S E C R E T STATE 101359

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SUBJECT: INDONESIA: IS SUHARTO LOSING HIS MANDATE TO
RULE?

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1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF INR REPORT NO. 786, DATED APRIL
27, 1977.

2. BEGIN SUMMARY. INDONESIA APPROACHES ITS PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS ON MAY 2 AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF RISING POPULAR
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DISCONTENT THAT HAS BROUGHT INTO QUESTION SUHARTO'S TENURE
AS PRESIDENT. PERVASIVE CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT,
THE FINANCIAL CRISIS IN STATE OIL CONGLOMERATE PERTAMINA,
THE INEPT ANNEXATION OF TIMOR, AND CURBS ON RELIGIOUS AND
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES HAVE CAUSED WIDESPREAD DISILLUSIONMENT
AMONG THE MILITARY, MUSLIM GROUPS, AND STUDENTS. ALTHOUGH
THE GOVERNMENT PARTY IS EXPECTED TO WIN THE MAY 1977 ELEC-
TIONS EASILY, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT GROWING DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

WILL CAUSE SUHARTO TO STEP DOWN EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN 1978. END SUMMARY.

3. BEGIN TEXT. DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS, RUMORS HAVE CIRCULATED IN JAKARTA QUESTIONING PRESIDENT SUHARTO'S MANDATE TO RULE. KEY MILITARY FIGURES WHO SUPPORT SUHARTO DO NOT WISH TO SEE HIM GO AT THIS JUNCTURE, AS INDONESIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE ON MAY 2. ELECTION TO THE PRESIDENCY, WHICH IN INDONESIA IS DECIDED BY A VOTE CONFINED TO MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT, WILL BE HELD IN 1978. BY THAT TIME HIS FUTURE MAY HAVE BEEN DECIDED.

4. A FINANCIAL CRISIS IN THE STATE-OWNED OIL CONGLOMERATE, PERTAMINA, AND INDONESIA'S INEPT HANDLING OF THE ANNEXATION OF THE FORMER PORTUGUESE COLONY OF TIMOR FORM THE BACKDROP AGAINST WHICH THE CURRENT POLITICAL UNEASE HAS DEVELOPED:

(A)--ALTHOUGH MOST INDONESIANS ACCEPT THAT AN INDEPENDENT TIMOR WOULD HAVE POSED AN UNACCEPTABLE RISK TO INDONESIA'S SECURITY, THE POOR LEADERSHIP DISPLAYED IN THE TAKEOVER OPERATION, WHICH STARTED IN DECEMBER 1975, THE ILL-PREPAREDNESS OF THE MILITARY, THE LONG LIST OF CASUALTIES, AND LACK OF PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF THE PARTICIPANTS (BECAUSE THE OPERATION WAS SEMI-COVERT) HAVE RESULTED IN A LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN THE SUHARTO REGIME, PARTICULARLY AMONG JUNIOR AND MIDDLE-LEVEL OFFICERS.

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(B)--THE PERTAMINA CRISIS HAS BEEN A MAJOR PUBLIC SCANDAL OVER THE PAST 18 MONTHS WHICH HAS RESULTED IN THE EROSION OF FOREIGN RESERVES AND THE SLOWING DOWN OF BADLY NEEDED DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES. CAUSED BY POOR MANAGEMENT, OVERLY AMBITIOUS NON-OIL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, AND LARGE-SCALE WASTE AND CORRUPTION, THE CRISIS HAS DEALT A RUDE BLOW TO THE PRESTIGE OF THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP, WHICH HAD REGARDED PERTAMINA AS ITS CHIEF PERQUISITE. THE REPERCUSSIONS ARE STILL NOT OVER. THE INVESTIGATION ORDERED BY SUHARTO INTO THE ROLE OF GENERAL IBNU, FORMER PERTAMINA CHIEF, IN THE AFFAIR MAY IMPLICATE OTHER HIGH-LEVEL MILITARY FIGURES AND FURTHER EMBARRASS THE SUHARTO REGIME. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO WITH IBNU IS CAUSING A RIFT IN THE JAKARTA LEADERSHIP.

5. THE "SAWITO AFFAIR":

6. WIDESPREAD DISCONTENT WITH SUHARTO'S RULE WAS BROUGHT INTO FOCUS IN AUGUST 1976 WITH THE CIRCULATION OF A LETTER CRITICAL OF THE SUHARTO GOVERNMENT. IT WAS DRAFTED BY SAWITO

KARTOWURTO, HEAD OF A GROUP OF MYSTICS, A FORMER GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WHO WAS AN ACTIVIST IN THE 1945 REVOLUTION.

7. SAWITO WAS HIMSELF OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE, BUT HE WAS ABLE TO OBTAIN THE SIGNATURES ON THE LETTER OF FORMER VICE-PRESIDENT HATTA, A GREATLY RESPECTED ELDER STATESMAN, AND FOUR OTHER INFLUENTIAL FIGURES, EACH THE LEADER OF ONE OF THE FOUR MAJOR INDONESIAN STREAMS OF CULTURAL THOUGHT--THE CHAIRMAN OF THE INDONESIAN MUSLIM SCHOLARS, THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CARDINAL, THE HEAD OF THE PROTESTANT COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (AND A RETIRED CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMED SERVICES), AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE INDONESIAN SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATION.

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8. THE GOVERNMENT REACTED VERY SHARPLY TO WHAT IT CONSIDERED AN ANTI-SUHARTO CONSPIRACY. SAWITO, WHO WAS REPORTEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHER DOCUMENTS CRITICIZING SUHARTO AND HIS FAMILY FOR CORRUPTION, WAS ARRESTED. THE FIVE PROMINENT SIGNATORIES TO THE LETTER WERE QUESTIONED AND THEN RELEASED AFTER WRITING APOLOGIES TO SUHARTO. DESPITE DISAVOWALS THAT THEY INTENDED TO USE THE LETTER AGAINST SUHARTO, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT AT LEAST ONE SIGNATORY--THE PROTESTANT LEADER--WILL CONTINUE TO WORK FOR A CONSENSUS TO REPLACE SUHARTO THROUGH NON-VIOLENT MEANS.

9. THE SAWITO AFFAIR DRAMATIZED STRONGLY FELT OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME AND WAS TYPICAL OF THE OBLIQUE WAY DISCONTENT IS OFTEN EXPRESSED IN INDONESIA. IT WAS ALSO SYMPTOMATIC OF THE INABILITY OF THE SYSTEM TO PROVIDE CHANNELS FOR EXPRESSION OF DISCONTENT; THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE PARLIAMENT, AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED, FAIL TO PERFORM THIS FUNCTION. THE GOVERNMENT'S STRONG REACTION TO THE SAWITO LETTER MAY HAVE DISTURBED THE DELICATE, INFORMAL WAY IN WHICH POLITICAL OPPOSITION HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO CONDUCT A DIALOGUE WITH THE REGIME, THUS REMOVING A SOCIAL SAFETY-VALVE AND ADDING TO TENSIONS.

10. DISCONTENT IN THE MILITARY:

11. SUHARTO IS STILL SUPPORTED BY MOST LEADING MILITARY FIGURES, AND HE COMMANDS MUCH RESPECT FOR PROVIDING STABILITY AFTER THE UPHEAVALS THAT FOLLOWED THE REMOVAL OF SUKARNO. HE HAS SUCCEEDED OVER THE YEARS IN EITHER REMOVING OR NEUTRALIZING SERIOUS RIVALS FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN THE MILITARY, AND NO SINGLE MILITARY LEADER SEEMS TO HAVE THE POWER BASE TO ENGINEER HIS REPLACEMENT.

12. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE SIGNS OF DISCONTENT AMONG THE MILITARY WHICH, IF THEY INCREASE, MAY EVENTUALLY FORCE LEADING LEADING OFFICERS TO MOVE IN CONCERT TO BRING

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SUHARTO DOWN:

(A)--A NUMBER OF SENIOR OFFICERS REPORTEDLY HAVE DISCUSSED HIS REPLACEMENT, IF ONLY IN GENERAL TERMS, AND OTHER, YOUNGER MILITARY REFORMERS HAVE EXPRESSED UNHAPPINESS AT THE CORRUPTION AND AT THE DISHONOR CAUSED BY THE SEMI-COVERT NATURE AND POOR LEADERSHIP OF THE TIMOR OPERATION.

(B)--THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED THAT SOME MILITARY OFFICERS, ESPECIALLY RETIRED AND YOUNGER MEN, MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE SAWITO AFFAIR BECAUSE OF THEIR DISMAY AT CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT.

(C)--SEVERAL SENIOR OFFICERS, OF WHOM MAJOR-GENERAL JUARSA OF THE SILIWANGI DIVISION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT, HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF VARIOUS ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES. JUARSA WAS RECALLED FROM HIS POST AS AMBASSADOR TO YUGOSLAVIA AND CHARGED WITH PUBLICLY EXPRESSING DISCONTENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT. HE IS ALSO ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE SAWITO AFFAIR.

(D)--OF SPECIAL CONCERN TO THE GOVERNMENT IS REPORTED DISCONTENT WITHIN THE IMPORTANT SILIWANGI DIVISION, WHICH IS COMPOSED MAINLY OF SUNDANESE FROM WEST JAVA AND IS A POTENTIAL SEEDING GROUND FOR ANTI-SUHARTO SENTIMENT. THE GOVERNMENT IS SUSPICIOUS OF CONTACTS BETWEEN SILIWANGI OFFICERS AND STUDENTS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

(E)--WELL-KNOWN RETIRED COMMANDER OF THE ARMED FORCES, GENERAL ABDUL HARIS NASUTION, HAS PRIVATELY DESCRIBED SUHARTO AS A VIRTUAL DICTATOR, SURROUNDED BY A HANDFUL OF GENERALS WHO HAVE GROWN RICH AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PEOPLE. NASUTION BELIEVES THAT UNLESS THERE IS A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT, THE PUBLIC--PARTICULARLY STUDENTS, CIVIL SERVANTS, AND RETIRED MILITARY--WILL RESORT TO VIOLENCE. HE HAS
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TOURED JAVA AND SUMATRA SPEAKING OUT TO RELIGIOUS, STUDENT, AND MILITARY GROUPS, BUT HE COUNSELS YOUNG OFFICERS AGAINST FORCIBLE CHANGE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS SO FAR TOLERATED NASUTION, A RESPECTED 1945 REVOLUTIONARY HERO WHO, IT FEELS, WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY DISSENT MOVEMENT.

13. DISSATISFACTION AMONG MUSLIMS:

14. SUHARTO FACES TWO THREATS FROM MUSLIM GROUPS:

(A)--OPPOSITION BY THE DEVELOPMENT UNITY PARTY (PPP), WHICH REPRESENTS A SPECTRUM OF ORTHODOX MUSLIM GROUPS FROM

CONSERVATIVE TO MODERATE; AND

(B)--ANTI-GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE BY MUSLIM GROUPS WHO ARE ALSO ORTHODOX BUT WHO ARE FANATICAL ENOUGH TO RESORT TO VIOLENCE.

15. MUSLIM LEADERS HAVE COMPLAINED ABOUT GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION, OPPRESSION, SURVEILLANCE, AND CURBS ON RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. MUSLIMS NOW MUST HAVE PERMISSION TO HOLD CERTAIN TRADITIONAL MOSQUE SERVICES AND OTHERWISE TO PROPAGATE THEIR RELIGION. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT ANTICIPATED THAT THE PPP WILL OBTAIN A LARGER PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE THAN THE COMBINED MUSLIM PARTIES DID IN THE 1971 ELECTIONS (27.2), RESTRICTIONS HAVE NEVERTHELESS BEEN PLACED ON ITS ABILITY TO WORK WITH ITS CONSTITUENCY, AND IN A NUMBER OF DISTRICTS DUBIOUS MEANS HAVE BEEN USED TO PREVENT THE REGISTRATION OF PPP CANDIDATES. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE, AND MUSLIM REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S HEAVY HAND IS LIKELY TO MOUNT. IT MAY WELL BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL ISSUE SINCE IT IS REPORTED THAT SOME MUSLIM GROUPS ARE RECEIVING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE--SO FAR FOR RELIGIOUS PURPOSES ONLY--FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND LIBYA.

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16. MODERATE MUSLIM LEADERS WITHIN THE PPP HAVE CRITICIZED THE PARTICIPATION OF A LEADING MUSLIM IN THE SAWITO AFFAIR. MANY HAVE A HIGH PERSONAL REGARD FOR SUHARTO HIMSELF, ALTHOUGH NOT FOR HIS FAMILY OR THE GENERALS WHO SURROUND HIM. THERE IS NO CURRENT EVIDENCE THAT ANY OF THE PPP'S MUSLIM SUPPORTERS HAVE FORMED A DISSIDENT GROUP TO OUST SUHARTO, BUT THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO BE ON GUARD AGAINST OUTBREAKS OF DISCONTENT.

17. EXTREMIST MUSLIMS ALSO CAUSE SUHARTO CONCERN. BASED FOR THE MOST PART IN RURAL AREAS, THEY BELIEVE THAT THE STATE SHOULD BE ORGANIZED ON NARROW ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES RATHER THAN ON SECULAR LINES. THEY DETEST CORRUPTION AND BELIEVE IT IS GENERATED CHIEFLY BY CHRISTIANS AND CHINESE, WHOM THEY SEE AS EXERTING TOO MUCH INFLUENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT. RECENTLY TWO EXTREMIST GROUPS--KOMANDO JIHAD (HOLY WAR COMMAND) AND MOMOK REVOLUSIONER (GHOSTS OF THE REVOLUTION), BOTH POSSIBLY CONNECTED TO THE FORMER DARUL ISLAM

EXTREMIST MOVEMENT--HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS BEING INVOLVED IN ACTS OF TERRORISM IN SUMATRA AND JAVA, INCLUDING THE BOMBING OF CHURCHES. THE IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE OF THESE GROUPS IS THE DISRUPTION OF THE MAY ELECTIONS; ULTIMATELY THEY HOPE FOR THE OUSTER OF SUHARTO, THEREBY PAVING THE WAY FOR A GOVERNMENT IN TUNE WITH THEIR CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM PRINCIPLES. THIS THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO ACHIEVE; ALREADY THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN FIRM ACTION. IN JANUARY,

SEVERAL HUNDRED PERSONS OF THESE EXTREMIST GROUPS WERE ARRESTED, AND CACHES OF ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES WERE RECOVERED.

18. IN THE LONG RUN, OPPOSITION BY THE NON-EXTREMIST AND RESPONSIBLE ORTHODOX MUSLIMS, WITH THEIR STRONG SENSE OF MORAL OUTRAGE, IS LIKELY TO PROVE THE GREATER THREAT TO SUHARTO. THE NARROW OUTLOOK OF THE EXTREMISTS SUGGESTS
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THAT THEY WILL BE UNABLE TO BROADEN THE BASE OF THEIR SUPPORT, WHEREAS THE MORE MODERATE MUSLIM GROUPS MIGHT BECOME THE RALLYING POINT FOR A LARGER SPECTRUM OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT SENTIMENT.

19. DISILLUSIONMENT AMONG THE STUDENTS:

20. STUDENTS, ALTHOUGH NOT SO ACTIVE A FORCE FOR POLITICAL CHANGE AS HITHERTO, ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY OPEN IN THEIR CRITICISM OF CORRUPTION. WHILE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE LARGE-SCALE PROTESTS, SEVERAL DEVELOPMENTS POINT TO GENERAL RESTLESSNESS, PARTICULARLY AMONG MUSLIM STUDENTS:

(A)--REGIONAL MILITARY COMMANDERS REPORT THAT MUSLIM STUDENTS ARE TRYING TO ORGANIZE AN ILLEGAL MOVEMENT SIMILAR TO THAT BEHIND THE 1974 DISTURBANCE (THE MALARI INCIDENT).

(B)--IN APRIL AND SEPTEMBER 1976, POLICE UNCOVERED STUDENT PLOTS TO CIRCULATE ANTI-GOVERNMENT LEAFLETS REPORTEDLY DESIGNED TO PROMOTE UNREST.

(C)--IN THE FALL OF 1976, LEAFLETS WERE DISTRIBUTED ON THE UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA CAMPUS STATING THAT THE SAWITO AFFAIR WAS DESIGNED TO FORCE SUHARTO FROM OFFICE, AND IMPLYING THAT SUHARTO'S REPLACEMENT WOULD BOLSTER THE MUSLIM RELIGION AND COUNTER CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN INDONESIA.

(D)--IN SEPTEMBER 1976, A "FANATICAL" MUSLIM STUDENT WAS ARRESTED IN POSSESSION OF EXPLOSIVES. HE LATER CONFESSED

TO PLOTTING TO KILL SUHARTO, SUHARTO'S FAMILY, AND TOP OFFICIALS IN THE GOVERNMENT. HE IS REPORTEDLY CONNECTED WITH SEVERAL STUDENT ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS.

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21. INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT REACTION--INCREASED SECURITY:

22. CONFRONTED WITH WIDESPREAD DISILLUSIONMENT AND GROWING SIGNS OF UNREST, THE GOVERNMENT HAS INCREASED THE LEVEL OF SECURITY, BOTH TO PREPARE FOR THE MAY 1977 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND TO PREVENT FURTHER ANTI-SUHARTO ACTIVITIES:

(A)--THE SECURITY GUARD AROUND SUHARTO AND HIS INNER CIRCLE HAS BEEN DISCREETLY REINFORCED.

(B)--GENERAL ALI MURTOPO, DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE STATE INTELLIGENCE COORDINATING AGENCY AND A LEADING PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER, AND OTHER INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS HAVE HELD DISCUSSIONS WITH VARIOUS MILITARY OFFICERS IN THE SILIWANGI DIVISION IN WEST JAVA TO STEM THE RISING LEVEL OF DISCONTENT.

(C)--IN JUNE 1976 SUHARTO WARNED THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY THAT IF RELIGIOUS OCCASIONS WERE USED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES TIGHT RESTRICTIONS WOULD BE PLACED ON THEM.

(D)--SECURITY OFFICERS HAVE INFILTRATED STUDENT GROUPS IN ORDER TO MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITIES, BUT THE GOVERNMENT HAS SO FAR REFRAINED FROM IMPOSING MORE STRINGENT CONTROLS.

23. PROSPECTS:

24. ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT PARTY, GOLKAR, IS EXPECTED TO WIN THE MAY 1977 ELECTION EASILY, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT RISING DISSATISFACTION WITH SUHARTO'S RULE MIGHT CAUSE HIM TO STEP DOWN BEFORE OR AFTER THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. WHILE DIFFICULT TO MEASURE, THE LEVEL OF DISCONTENT DOES NOT THREATEN THE GOVERNMENT AT THIS MOMENT, BUT THE SITUATION CLEARLY IS VERY SERIOUS AND HAS BEEN
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AGGRAVATED BY ELECTION CAMPAIGN EXCESSES BY BOTH GOLKAR AND THE OPPOSITION.

25. A NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS FOR THE DEPARTURE OF SUHARTO APPEAR POSSIBLE:

(A)--HE WILL BE RE-ELECTED BY THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT IN THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND THEREAFTER CHOOSE HIS OWN SUCCESSOR AND RESIGN.

(B)--HE WILL BE PERSUADED BY LEADING MILITARY FIGURES TO RESIGN, THE CHOICE OF SUCCESSOR BEING LEFT TO THEM.

(C)--THE MILITARY, CONVINCED THAT HIS USEFULNESS IN OFFICE HAS ENDED, WILL REPLACE HIM BY MEANS OF A BLOODLESS MILITARY COUP.

(D)--OUTBREAKS OF CIVIL VIOLENCE, ESPECIALLY BY STUDENT
AND MUSLIM GROUPS, WILL FORCE THE MILITARY TO EFFECT A
CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT AND REPLACE HIM.

26. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO SUHARTO, THE MILITARY-
DOMINATED FORM OF GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE,
AS ARE THE PROBLEMS OF CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT, AND
THE POTENTIAL FOR PERIODIC ANTI-GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE.
END TEXT. VANCE

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